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MEMORIAL DAY.

ADDRESS AT

FT. MADISON, IOWA,

— BY —

THOMAS HEDGE,

MAY 30, 1890.

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The story of the rise of civil and religious liberty on this continent is full of incongruities and of contradictions. The Pilgrim Fathers planted their commonwealth among the gray rocks of Massachusetts, that they might have freedom to worship God; but we remember they compelled the flight to Narragansett of the learned and sincere Roger Williams, the friend of Milton, chiefly because he held forth that the civil magistrate's power extends only to the bodies, goods and outward state of man, and thus the other commonwealth of Rhode Island and Providence plantations had its beginning.

It has been an American custom, reaching back to the

days of our grandfathers, to read in public, with religious solemnity, the Declaration of Independence on the morning of the Fourth of July, and the winged words of Jefferson—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed"—we imagined, because they stirred our blood, that they set forth our profoundest faith. But it is only thirty years since no American citizen was permitted to speak in the spirit of those words below the lower rapids of yonder river, and only thirty years ago that if that American citizen should stretch forth his hand to help any man, woman or child, of a certain class, to cross that river in search of that unalienable right of liberty, he would be guilty of a crime against the government whose symbol was this flag. (We are not ashamed to remember that there were not a few criminals of this sort in this neighborhood in those days.)

We were not in spirit a nation or a union, but a most heterogeneous aggregation of peoples, under the yoke of as many various customs, traditions, prejudices and bigotries as there were different communities. State lines were a reality, sectional feeling and mutual dread as impassable as the mountain range.

The truth spoken by him who was more than prophet, 'This country cannot remain half slave and half free,' at last became evident, and the darkness came and the labor and agony of the new birth of freedom.

It seemed as if the spirit of the Lord moved over the face of the land and breathed again into the nostrils of this people the breath of life. The eyes of their understanding were opened; it was given to them to see the

invisible, to stand upon the Mount of Transfiguration and to be inspired with the presence of them of old time who had toiled, suffered and triumphed for the good of those to be. All human capacities seemed to be enlarged. All human faculties to be reinforced. All human affections quickened and purified in this fire of trial. The cause was seen to be and accepted as the cause common and vital to us all. It was the people's war. The times grew spacious. Nothing was too great or too high for the energy the constancy, the self-denial, the faith of this people in their devotion to this cause—ever old and ever new—of human liberty. As in the days of the revolution it called manhood from the tranquil pursuits and toils of peace, the delight of life, to absence from home, to cold, hunger, the prison-pen, disease, wounds, death; it called woman to poverty, to loneliness, to agony of suspense, to widowhood and bereavement of her first born. There were days which were to her as a thousand years, when the very air quivered with the tidings of defeat or the hardly less dreadful word of victory; when she was told that while men of their abundance had cast their offerings into the treasury she had given more than them all—even all her living.

When this death angel came, although for tears she saw it not, the glory of the Lord shone 'round her dwelling akin to that of the star of Bethlehem, for it had been vouchsafed to her to bear a son found worthy to die for the help of his fellow-men.

And the boys whom these women with christian grace had sent away, these boys whom we bear in memory at this hour, deeming it the highest privilege and pride of our earthly life that we hobnobbed with them and marched with them and were with them where they fell, they made up an army such as never had been known before. Their understanding comprehended fully the purpose of their

warfare—it was not for ambition, for material conquest, for personal aggrandizement, nor to relieve themselves of personal oppression, for they had never realized the presence or approach of any tyranny. The flag to them was but the sign of the enforcement and security of those unalienable rights, which they had been trained to believe were the birthright of all men. It was such a sign, not for themselves or their's alone, not for a class, a sect, a party, a generation or a race, but for everyone made in the image of God, wherever and so long as that flag might wave.

I said that we were a heterogeneous people, marked by our provincial prejudices and bigotries. Travel broadens the view and dispels the mists of prejudice, and no sort of travel so effectually as that pursued by our young volunteer. After the boy from Iowa had trudged alongside of the boy from Vermont or Pennsylvania, or of the boy whose father was born in Ireland or Germany, and had drank from the same canteen, and shared his hard tack, had climbed the same opposing earthwork at his side, had witnessed his boyish valor "in the imminent deadly breach" "on the fiery edge of battle," and had lain down beside him in the swamp and suffered the same cold, the same homesickness, he began to realize what Paul meant by all men being of one blood; boundary lines and section corners vanished, and his love of country, as of his countrymen, came to comprehend the wide continent, bounded only by the inviolate seas.

He so bore himself that he conquered even the prejudices of his opposers, and to-day wherever his grave may be, whether by those of his kindred or in the red soil of Virginia, in the mountains of Georgia or Tennesse, or under the flowers of Carolina, it is at home, in his own country, a pledge and monument of perpetual union, and of ever growing peace and good will among its people.

As something of the duty of tradition mingles in these

ceremonies, let me place in the minds of those born since the day of Appomattox a hint of the personality of the "boy in blue." As you read that "the old 'Continentals' in their ragged regimentals faltered not," your fancy pictures a grizzled soldier toughened by the frosts of many winters, when in truth he and the Minute Man and the Green Mountain boy, as well as the boy in blue, were of the same age, which is yours. The soldier whose memory we are met to honor was not such as these to-day—his face lined and refined by care, with stooping shoulders and whitening hair, and halting step, and eyes grown dim; but such as these were five and twenty years ago; his face bright with hope, his gaze clear and proud with purpose, his step firm and sure, with the spring of youth. And my veteran brothers, those who were taken away from us at the front are now before the vision of our memory as when they marched out to die. Imperishable youth is theirs. Their fame shall live so long as man loves liberty, the example of their sacrifice be an inspiration to future patriotism, their spirits the airy leaders of heroes yet to be.

It was ordained that they should die in glory—no less was it in the infinite purpose that we should survive. The earnest lesson of the day is that we learn and fulfil that purpose, that while they sleep we guard the field they died to win.

In the quarter of a century that has passed since the last surrender we have had time to come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, to lose something of the exaltation of spirit of the time of war in the dusty scramble for the things that perish, and a generation has arisen that cannot fully appreciate at what great price their freedom was obtained and preserved. We need to be reminded in season and out of season that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." The old theory seems to be regaining its lost ground, that the jurisdiction of human government is boundless, and its authority without limit; that all things,

including riches and wisdom and virtue and honor, can be attained by the enactment of a legislature. We forget, that while government is an essential agency of society—supreme within its sphere—that its sphere is limited and that it is only an agency, like the Sabbath, made for man: that its province is only in public matters, to protect each from others' trespasses and to insure to every man his own. We do not keep in mind that government cannot create or confer the essential rights of man; that as Jefferson wrote, it is only an institution to secure these rights, and as it does not create or confer these rights, so it cannot justly impair them or take them away.

So long as men are self-seeking there will be efforts made to usurp power in legislation for selfish ends. So long as men are self-righteous they will strive to impose their own standard of right and wrong upon their neighbors, and as the people prefer, or wish to seem to prefer, whatsoever things are honest, or true, or of good report, with success proportioned to the apparent worthiness of the end to be attained. Our liberties are in little danger from the Philistines; it is the leaven of the Pharisee that is the present menace of the republic.

While it was the duty of the veteran, as a soldier, "not to reason why, only to do and die," it is his duty as a veteran citizen always to reason why. To him much has been given—of him much shall be required. A sovereign citizen, to him is intrusted only in fuller measure, and to a higher degree, the charge of the Roman consul—to see that the republic receives no harm.

As the sphere of government is limited, so, comparatively, is his duty as a citizen; including this duty, intertwined with it, but infinitely broader and higher, is his duty as a man. The conscientious fulfillment of the daily round, the common task, is the path laid out for him to toil in after virtue. We cannot escape the scrutiny and

the judgment of the boy of to-day, his notion of the defender of the republic, his estimate of those comrades over whose repose we this day scatter the rose, the lily and the violet, is made up of what he sees in us. Their good name is in our keeping. No higher tribute can we pay to the fame of the American soldier than "the white flower of a blameless life." Comrades, brothers! let our remaining days be so disciplined that when our rest is sounded our neighbors may mourn each one of us as we mourn these; that contemplating a character full rounded, freed from stain of ill doing, or rust of indolence, they may say lovingly and proudly, "As his young comrades died, so this veteran lived—for the advantage of his fellow-men."

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